

Arcadian modernism and national identity: The 'Murdoch press' and the 1939 Australian *Herald* 'Exhibition of French and British Contemporary Art'

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Abstract

The 1939 Australian 'Herald' *Exhibition of French and British Contemporary Art* is said not only to have resonated 'in the memories of those who saw it' but to have formed 'the experience even of many who did not' (Chanin & Miller 2005: 1). Under the patronage of Sir Keith Murdoch, entrepreneur and managing director of the Melbourne 'Herald' newspaper, and curated by the *Herald's* art critic Basil Burdett, the exhibition attracted large and enthusiastic audiences. Remaining in Australia for the duration of the War, the exhibition of over 200 European paintings and sculpture, received extensive promotion and coverage in the 'Murdoch press'. Resonating with an Australian middle-class at a time of uncertainty about national identity, this essay explores the exhibition as an 'Arcadian' representation of the modern with which the population could identify. The exhibition aligned a desire to be associated with the modern with a restoration of the nation's European heritage. In its restoration of this continuity, the *Herald* exhibition affected an antiquarianism that we can explore, drawing on Friedrich Nietzsche's insights into the use of traditional history.

Keywords: affect; cultural heritage; *Herald* exhibition; Murdoch press; museums

The Australian bush legend and the 'digger' tradition both extol the Australian character as one of endurance, courage and mateship (White 1981: 127). Graeme Davison (2000: 11) observes that using this form of 'heroic' tradition to inspire Australian national identity represents a monumental formation of the past that is 'the standard form of history in new nations'. Here, Davison is drawing on Friedrich Nietzsche's (1997) interpretation of traditional history as either monumental or antiquarian in its outlook and effects. Monumental history, for Nietzsche, looks to heroes and great events of the past and is used to generate moral inspiration in the present. In contrast, antiquarian history aims to preserve the past, to revive and restore the past. The intent of antiquarianism is to maintain social and national identity through a continuity 'of soil, language and urban life' as if these were there all the time (Foucault 1991: 95). Nietzsche acknowledges that history of one kind or another is necessary; that 'every nation requires, in accordance with its goals, energies and needs, a certain kind of knowledge of the past'. However, he is particularly cognizant of the dangers that arise when either form of history is misused, whether this occurs through 'privilege, a caste, [or] a dynasty'. The aim then, he argues, is to use history as a critical tool to 'implant in ourselves a new habit, a new instinct' that can free us from the mistakes of the past (Nietzsche 1997: 77, 76). Nietzsche's interpretation of history sheds new light on the *Herald* exhibition and its relation to shifting Australian national identity.

Reinforcement of Australian national identity by monumentalizing its past was no longer the only imperative following the end of the Great War and hence the interwar years saw a waning of the efficacy of the two traditional myths – the rural pioneer and heroic digger. The notion of the courageous 'digger' had emerged in 1917 when the term was conferred upon members of the First Australian Imperial Force (AIF), however the War dealt a heavy blow to Australian ideals of heroism and 'as the sombre lessons of Gallipoli and the Western Front sank

in, many Australians recoiled from the unthinking patriotism that had sent so many of their countrymen to their deaths' (Davison 2000: 46). The rural pioneer was also losing efficacy as a symbol of national identity, as, like the digger, its symbolism was in conflict with progress, and with the goals of manufacturers who 'encouraged a view of Australia which stressed industrial progress, cultural "maturity" and urban sophistication' (White 1981: 149).

Mood for change

Australia had been isolated from Europe during the War and into the 1920s; an isolation accepted as necessary in order to protect the 'young' nation from the morbidity and decadence of the old world. 'The blockade against Modernism was just one part of a system of legal and ideological barriers, ranging from tariffs to deportation, that were constructed in the 1920s to isolate Australia from rotten old Europe, and from the shocks of proletarian revolt in particular' (McQueen 1979: 18). However, by the mid-1930s, with safety no longer deemed the national priority, many came to believe that Australia's isolation had led to a national 'backwardness, insulation and lack of sophistication' (White 1981: 145). The Australian public were not unfamiliar with the visual language of Modernism: 'Fresh ideas were circulated by way of publications, reproductions and exhibitions, and Modernist style had permeated popular culture'. Individual Australians considered themselves 'modern' through the possession of increasingly available commodities such as the car, the refrigerator and the wireless (Chanin & Miller 2005: 127, 70). So, while the traditional figures of the pioneer and the digger remained alive in the popular consciousness, this was tempered by a national desire to embrace the modern.

The mood for change was well-gauged by Keith Murdoch who argued, in convincing the Board of the *Herald* newspaper to finance an exhibition of European modern art, that 'Gallipoli had given us one kind of maturity. A great *Herald* exhibition of contemporary French and British art would give us another kind of maturity' (cited in Chanin & Miller 2005: 167). Murdoch explains in his preface for the *Herald* exhibition catalogue, that Australian artists with 'fine taste' would have their vision widened by direct contact with 'those great masters whose discoveries are so profoundly influencing the artistic expressions of our time' (cited in Chanin & Miller 2005: vii).

It is often noted that artists interested in modern art responded productively to the representation of European Modernism in the *Herald* exhibition. Indeed the *Herald* exhibition is often credited as having 'marked the beginning of modern art in Australia' (cited in Chanin & Miller 2005: 20). James Gleeson, for example, attributes his interest in surrealism to Salvador Dali's painting *L'homme fleur* (1932), which he encountered in the *Herald* exhibition at the Melbourne Town Hall in October 1939. That such interest occurred, however, does not prevent speculation that a more nuanced national perspective toward contemporary art might have been shaped if Murdoch had promoted the 'maturity' of Australian artists who were thinking through and reconfiguring the tenets and meanings of Modernism.

The assumption that cultural influences at this time flowed from the 'old' world to the 'new' in a one-directional manner is inadequate. Australian artists were not only engaged with Modernism, but also with reconfiguring the insights of Modernism to accord with very particular understandings of what art meant for them. Ian Fairweather, Grace Cossington Smith and Margaret Preston, for example, had distinct solutions to the intellectual concerns raised by modernism. In 1919, two decades before the *Herald* exhibition, Roland Wakelin and Roy de Maistre in Sydney exhibited a group of their experimental 'colour music' paintings using pure colour to extend the laws of musical harmony. Arising from de Maistre's musical training and the treatment of shell-shocked patients, 'de Maistre's Modernism had grown out of the Great War and cannot be explained simply in terms of reproductions brought from Europe' (McQueen 1979: 5). In 1938, prior to viewing modern art 'in the flesh' at the *Herald* exhibition, Sidney Nolan produced monotypes on blotting paper that were decidedly 'contemporary' in their non-figurative abstraction (Baker 2003). Mutual influences flowed between Australian artists in London and Francis Bacon. Bacon's principal debt was to Roy de Maistre, but Harrison and Daniels (2012: 33) also point out 'reciprocities with two of Bacon's foremost Australian artist-contemporaries, Sidney Nolan and Brett Whiteley'.

There are contrasting approaches to the emergence of modernism in Australian art. Writing in the 1970s, Humphrey McQueen (1979) focused on the confusion surrounding modernism for most Australian artists arising from their superficial understanding of the science of the unconscious and the relativity of time, as well as an inability to apprehend class conflict. More recently Terry Smith (2002: 52) observes that artists were not only engaging with modern art 'on the superficial level of imitating a style, but at the deepest level, at the roots of what it is to begin to conceive a work of art'. During the 1930s, artists and cultural commentators were very aware of the uncertainty surrounding national identity and participated in debates about what should constitute a 'national' Australian art. These debates took various stances with progressive critics vying for a diversity of aesthetic engagements. It was very apparent to Roland Wakelin, for example, that a national art could 'not be achieved merely by painting such subjects as gum trees or Australian troops on the march', while Melbourne-based art critic and bookseller Gibbo Nibbi mused that 'we must believe in Australian artists rather than in a mythical Australian art' (cited in Chanin & Miller 2005: 48).

Arcadian landscape

The reception of art in Australia is closely tied to images of landscape, images that artist and critical thinker Ian Burn (1991) argues are ideologically informed by middle-class identity. Regardless of whether we agree or not with the Marxist view that the reception of art is dictated by class and power relations, Burn's theories are insightful in contextualizing the ideological dimension of the Australian landscape in art. This identification goes back to the 1880s and mythology surrounding the so-called Heidelberg painters who were deemed to have created the first 'Australian School' of art. Yet, rather than a 'new' school of art, it is acknowledged that the Heidelberg painters worked in 'an international style of academicized Impressionism' (Sayers 2001: 79). McQueen (1979: 115) interprets that for traditionalists like James S. MacDonald and his generation, 'delight in an Australian pastoral became one measure of their distance from Pozieres'. MacDonald was the outspoken and conservative director of the New South Wales Art Gallery (1929–1937) and National Gallery of Victoria (1936–1941). As a form of emotional response to the trenches of The Great War, the epitome of 'fine taste' for MacDonald was obvious as measured by Arthur Streeton's pastoral paintings,

Streeton's major canvasses have in them music akin to great overtures; golden, morning stuff, melodious and Grecian. To me they point to the way in which life should be lived in Australia, with the maximum of flocks and the minimum of factories. ... ours is the world's Pastoral and all it implies of herds and flocks and vines and hives, orchards, olives and grain. Are smokestacks prettier or healthier than groves or do they give rise to finer deeper emotions? Hardly. (McQueen 1979: 114)

The 'Australian-ness' of this 'pastoral' art has been interpreted by Ian Burn arising from imagery that is based on an idealization of the bush for the consumption of the urban middle-class. The bush, as it appears in the paintings of the Heidelberg artists, is neither that of the bush worker, nor the bush of the squatter or pastoralist. Burn (1991: 35) observes how a set of pictorial devices and motifs are used to advance an Arcadian 'type' of bush landscape.

The portrayal of the landscape in a positive class-specific manner invoked the idea that the existing order of society was also positive, timeless and unassailable. In other words, the middle-class visitor identifies himself ... in this youthful, expansive, unconstrained arcadian image.

We might think of the *Herald* exhibition of contemporary European art as offering Australian audiences an updated version of this idealization. The intention was to display modern European art that reflected aesthetic tendencies that might preserve rather than challenge the integrity of Australian Impressionism. Hence the exhibition focussed on French Post-impressionist art and British art that demonstrated the impact of Post-impressionism. It did not include art that confronted the horror of war, dislocations associated with urbanization and modern life or the working class. Pablo Picasso, for example, painted *Guernica* in 1937; however this representation

of the destructive forces of war is distant from the tenor of the nine Picasso paintings, including *Harlequin* (1908), *Danseuses* (1909), and *Guitare et vase de fleurs* (1934), selected by Basil Burdett for the 1939 *Herald* exhibition.

The art Burdett chose for display in the exhibition dwelt positively on Australia's European cultural heritage. Along with paintings by Picasso and cubist works by Georges Braque and Juan Gris, Burdett's French artists included Georges Seurat, Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh, Henri Matisse and Max Ernst. British artists included Paul Nash, Ben Nicholson, Stanley Spencer, Jacob Epstein, Augustus John and Walter Richard Sickert. With the exception of two works by Frances Hodgkins and Ethel Walker, the near absence of women artists in the exhibition continued the gendering of modern art as a masculine project. The modern world represented in the urban landscapes, pastoral scenes, still life, portraiture, and domestic interiors in the *Herald* exhibition was an uncorrupted idyll. The exhibition validated middle-class identification with the 'modern' in such a way that the Arcadian experience remained intact. This observation does not mean the exhibition was not interpreted by some critics as a dangerous infiltration that would degrade Australian culture. Institutional conservatism to modern art prevailed in Australia; James S. MacDonald and Lionel Lindsay for example, regarded modernism as an 'imported and perverted art hailing from the dead hand of European decadence' (Rees 2010: 7). MacDonald dismissed the *Herald* exhibition as the work of 'degenerates and perverts' (Chanin & Miller: 2005: 88).

Putting aside conservative institutional directors and critics fearful of the toxic influence of all modern art, whether home grown or European, we can apprehend the immense popularity of the 'Arcadian' Modernism presented in the *Herald* exhibition as characteristic of Nietzsche's 'antiquarian nation'. Such nations, he argues, have a tendency to look backward to their past heritage in order to preserve this past in the present rather than to engender the new; such a nation he observes, 'undervalues that which is becoming because it has no instinct for divining it' (Nietzsche 1997: 75). The *Herald* exhibition affected assuagement, or a mood of forgetting. It did not contest or confront the circumstances of The Great War or the Depression, nor did it respond to the rise of Fascism in Europe. It neither alienated audiences nor was it critical of history. Instead the exhibition appeased national memory through an idea of the modern that updated, but did not interrogate, the traditional values held by what political historian Judith Brett (2003) calls the Australian moral middle-class. In these values we can locate Nietzsche's antiquarian nation clinging to 'its own environment and companions' a stance that can only result in a 'restricted field of vision' (Nietzsche 1997: 74).

The exhibition's focus on French and British art saw significant European artists and entire genres of Modernism omitted. Several Australian paintings were included in the British section of the exhibition but these neither represented the art of the avant-garde nor the range of modern Australian art available. The critical politics inherent in representations of working class side life in modern urban environments by Melbourne's social realist artists for example was overlooked. Out of 217 artworks in the exhibition, there were only two that were resolutely non-figurative. In the focus on French and British artists, there was no representation of Futurism, the Russian avant-garde or German Expressionism. The social satire of Otto Dix, Max Beckmann and George Grosz was missing, but not because their art was unavailable. The Nazi purge of German museums had 'produced a glut in the market for modern German works, offering unbelievable bargains, such as Otto Dix's *Self-Portrait* for US \$40 and Kirchner's *Hanging* for US \$10' (Chanin & Miller 2005: 192). Nor was Basil Burdett's selection of art the result of financial constraint or difficulty in procuring loans from lenders. Burdett had ample funds to develop the exhibition as well as an impressive network of European collectors and galleries from which to select works for inclusion in the exhibition. He was also apparently not constrained by his employer: 'Murdoch had built his empire on the competence of his staff and he gave Burdett a free hand to collect whatever he thought best in Europe' (McQueen 1979: 37).

Murdoch and the moral middle-class

The *Herald* exhibition's antiquarian Modernism was supported by a rhetoric that aligned with the principles of liberalism. In his preface to the exhibition catalogue Keith Murdoch states:

The Collection is offered in the deeply-felt belief that, through those who will observe and study it, a force will go forth in ever-widening circles with useful effect upon Australian life. (cited in Chanin & Miller 2005: 9)

Based on belief that art is civilizing, the 'force' of the *Herald* exhibition is here judged to lie in its 'useful effect upon Australian life'. The liberal idea of the useful citizen is akin to the view that the middle-class is the bearer of moral virtue. Judith Brett describes the middle-class as 'a projected moral community whose members are identified by their possession of particular moral qualities'. She evidences this with Robert Menzies' understanding that the middle-class 'are the backbone of this country', a phrase that she notes makes the 'moral qualities of the individual the basis of the nation's identity' (Brett 2003: 7, 8). Menzies, who held strong beliefs in the monarchy and in traditional ties with Britain, became Prime Minister of Australia in 1939 (and was to serve a collective total of over 18 years in this role).

The moral 'truth' of Murdoch's message was common sense for the liberal Australian reader. As well as an influential figure in political, business and cultural circles, Keith Murdoch was the nephew of Walter Murdoch, a writer of moral essays widely read and published in Australian newspapers. Judith Brett (2003: 59) observes that Walter Murdoch's secular sermons were 'evidence of the appetite for advice on moral improvement among his middle-class readers'. Walter Murdoch's middle-class readers largely comprised the audience of the *Herald* exhibition. Making up approximately half the country's population,¹ the Australian middle-class was the consumer of the 'Murdoch press', which had an influence that 'through a network of shareholdings ... extended over half of Australia' (Chanin & Miller 2005: 162). The moral influence of the Murdoch name also extended to Keith's father the Rev. Patrick Murdoch and his grandfather who had been a Presbyterian minister in the Scottish Free Church in Aberdeenshire.

Rather than join the clergy, Keith Murdoch, the third of seven children, became a journalist and newspaper proprietor. During the First World War, he was an unofficial war correspondent and his editorial skill and opinion held considerable sway with Australian politicians whom he knew through family church connections and through friendships cultivated with English royalty. In 1920, Murdoch became the chief editor of the Melbourne evening *Herald* and quickly became managing editor. His interstate press 'empire' began in 1926 and expanded steadily so that by 1935 Murdoch and the *Herald* had interests in 11 Australian commercial radio stations. He openly used this influence to campaign against Labor politicians through his support of Joseph Lyons and Robert Menzies (Chanin & Miller 2005: 162).

In 1933, Murdoch's influence extended into art politics when he became a trustee of the Public Library, Museum and National Gallery of Victoria. Murdoch claimed the role as trustee was 'a form of relaxation' (2005: 1964). Humphrey McQueen (1979: 38) offers the view that 'If Sir Keith could not be an aristocrat, he could at least imitate the Rockefellers'. However Murdoch was not without a certain expertise given he was an avid collector of Chinese porcelain, English period furniture and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British glass and silver. 'Objects, useful and realisable' notes McQueen (1979: 37). Murdoch was familiar to the Melbourne art world; it was at his suggestion, following a scornful exhibition review in the *Herald* by Gino Nibbo in 1931, that a display of over sixty Modernist prints opened in the Assembly room of Melbourne's *Herald* building. This initiative led to 'pro-Modernists' convening a contemporary group in Melbourne (McQueen 1979: 22). The support for modern art that this suggests needs to be mediated by the fact that Murdoch's preferences were decidedly 'old school'. He disliked 'the new' art with its

cubes and columns and many geometrical lines, because I cannot follow those who convey their thoughts by this means nor by the dissections and vivisections of animals and humans and the painting of numerous watches and lurid colour planes. (McQueen 1979: 37)

The common sense assumptions of liberalism, notably the imperatives of democracy and individualism, are manifest in the rhetoric promoting the *Herald* exhibition and would not have seemed untoward to the readership of the Murdoch press. As literary theorist Catherine Belsey (1996: 4) notes, common sense 'appears obvious because it is inscribed in the language we

speak'. In the exhibition's catalogue preface Keith Murdoch accords artists' success to their capacity for 'allowing nothing to curb their complete freedom' (Chanin & Miller 2005: 12). The 'genius' of artists is imparted to their individualism. In one of many prominent advertisement's promoting the exhibition, Picasso is described as 'The greatest legend of Paris, leading the life of a hermit, remote and inaccessible, nobody knows what he is likely to do next' (Chanin & Miller 2005: 208). Underlying the rhetoric is the notion that the free-thinking, independent man has transcended the dependent forces of an unfree society. This view has a long resonance drawing on Protestant commitment to the morally independent individual, the middle-class struggle for political representation, and the economic experience of the small entrepreneur who depended on disciplined hard work and self-restraint to survive (Brett 2003: 11).

Rhetoric and affect

The affective dimension of meaning-making in cultural contexts is increasingly appraised in studies of museums, exhibitions, heritage sites as well as visual culture (see for example, Gregory & Witcomb 2007; Dudley 2010; Best 2011). In this respect, it can be useful to distinguish between didactic affect and affects that are unintentional. This distinction reflects the view that the process of generating meaning in cultural spaces is more complicated than often conceded (Baker 2008). In the literature of museum studies, the process of generating didactic affect tends to go unnamed as a specific curatorial or exhibition device; it is subsumed into the museum's interpretative role in the production of knowledge. Separating the two dimensions of affect assists in thinking about embodied experience, although while both affective dimensions operate simultaneously they are perhaps experientially inseparable (Baker 2008: 26).

We can garner insight into the didactic use of rhetorical gesture to affect meaning in exhibition texts using Louise Ravelli's stylistic analysis (2006) where she breaks down the language of exhibition texts into formal usage. The power of rhetoric operates by using speech to incur the maximum impact of an idea or belief. In measuring the accessibility of exhibition texts, Ravelli highlights the importance of textual modality. In this regard, the language of Keith Murdoch's preface in the *Herald* exhibition catalogue fits to a certain extent, the textual mode Ravelli associates with the 'modernist museum' (Ravelli 2006:72). She distinguishes between the modernist museum and the 'new post-museum'. The interactions that are common to the modernist museum are authoritative and conceptualize visitors as an 'undifferentiated mass audience, and as the recipients of a transmission mode of pedagogy' (Ravelli 2006:71). The role of the modernist museum is that of authority relating to a novice. However, although Murdoch's text is authoritative, the stylistic inflections of his text are personal and his stance is subjective. The 'offer' and the admission of his 'deeply-held belief' impart a personal opinion. Ravelli identifies this mode of personal style and subjective stance in exhibition texts with the interactional approach of the 'new post-museum' (Ravelli 2006:72).

That the *Herald* exhibition was organized not by a museum but by a news 'corporation', in part accounts for its particular textual modality. The language of Murdoch's preface implies an equitable form of partnership between the exhibition organizers and its audience. Catherine Belsey (1996: 91) notes that the functions of discourse are distinguishable as three modes of texts – declarative, imperative and interrogative. The imperative form is the most direct way of realizing a command, and is a direct inscription of power. In its grammatical form, the 'offer' made to the audience in the *Herald* preface is a modulated interrogative rather than a direct imperative (Ravelli 2006: 61).

The intentional didactic affect around the *Herald* exhibition and its textual discourse coincided with a more serendipitous form of spatial affect arising from the organization of the exhibition. In Melbourne and Sydney, the exhibition was initially displayed in the Melbourne Town Hall and at Sydney department store David Jones and not at the National Gallery of Victoria or at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Despite Keith Murdoch's position by that time as Chairman of the Board of Trustees at the National Gallery of Victoria, this venue was not made available for exhibition. As Chanin and Miller (2005: 204) note, 'MacDonald and others who were unsympathetic to it, tendered the excuse that charging admission to an exhibition could not be allowed'. Similarly in Sydney, 'the Minister for Public Instruction ruled that no admission charges could be permitted' (Chanin & Miller 2005: 208). However, this barely

disguised mask of 'arch' art museum conservatism was ultimately to the exhibition's advantage. The Melbourne Town Hall venue imbued the display with an aura of civic importance while at the same time acknowledging a relationship of relevance to the citizenry. The elitism and connoisseurship associated with the display of culture in the modernist art museum was overwritten by a sense of inclusiveness. Equally effective, displaying the exhibition at the new David Jones department store in Elizabeth Street in Sydney, the largest department store in Australia, presented modern art within the accessible and inclusive environs of highly desirable modern consumer products.

Press campaign

The *Herald* exhibition was accompanied by a highly visible campaign in the Murdoch press that included daily feature articles, advertising, and promotions. Newspapers were a particularly favourable medium for dispensing and circulating this campaign material. Benedict Anderson (1991: 25) notes that the development of print media 'provided the technical means for "re-presenting" the kind of imagined community that is the nation'. The reading of newspapers is an act of 'mass ceremony' involving large numbers of people who engage with selected events in simultaneous time. This facilitates the myth of a common entity between groups of people who are strangers. Anderson (1991: 36) notes,

... the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed on the subway, barbershop, or by residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life [and thus] fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations.

A relationship of 'intimacy' connecting the Australian public vicariously with the *Herald* exhibition commenced with a series of articles written by Basil Burdett while he was travelling in Europe selecting work for the exhibition. Published in early 1939 in the *Herald*, the *Adelaide Advertiser* and the Sydney *Daily Telegraph*, these articles, which have been described as evoking the air of a last 'grand tour', captured the imagination of the Australian public: 'Burdett's readers met artists, gallery directors, writers, sophisticates, gourmets. His articles resembled that of 'Baudelaire's *flâneur*, wandering in the culture, telling tales as if to an intimate' (Chanin & Miller 2005: 5). Before the exhibition even reached the shores of Australia, Burdett's readership had become a 'community in anonymity' sharing an antiquarian narrative in which they could recognize and identify themselves.

Inclusionary affects

It is sobering to contrast the inclusionary measures to generate audience involvement in the *Herald* exhibition with the inclusionary devices used in the art exhibitions being produced around the same time in Nazi Germany. In the Nazi exhibitions, we can discern the danger Nietzsche observes inherent in the abuse of traditional history. The German Nazi Party simultaneously opened two art exhibitions in Munich in 1937: The *Great German Art Exhibition* (*Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung*) and *Degenerative Art* (*Entartete Kunst*). The former exhibition was the inaugural event for the House of German Art (*Haus der Deutschen Kunst*), the Nazi's new national museum in Munich. The exhibition included around 600 sculptures and paintings, which were mostly heavily idealized figures, landscapes and representations of neoclassical themes. Across the park, in an unremarkable municipal facility, *Degenerative Art* also opened. This exhibition of 700 of the modern paintings and sculptures, which had been systematically removed from German museums since 1933, was intended to convey the degenerate influence of the international/Bolshevik/Jewish Modernism that the pure German Nazi art would 'overcome'.

The art in the *Degenerate Art* exhibition, which was crammed into small rooms and hung with a random disdain for the aesthetics of museum display, was intended to appal and disgust German visitors. Instead, however, many visitors appear to have been enthralled by the art in the exhibition. Karsten Schubert (2000: 38) notes that visitors to the exhibition remained

remarkably immune to manipulation. Peter Vergo (2000: 55) similarly observes that despite the Nazi's enormous propaganda effort, 'the works themselves remained curiously resistant to this kind of treatment'. The *Great German Art Exhibition* also failed to generate the response that was intended. As Frederic Spotts (2002: 330) suggests, despite the effort taken to construct a populist exhibition in which every Aryan 'was sure to find a painting which communicated to her/him' perhaps audiences were put off by 'the frame of the entire exhibit and surrounding events disallow[ing] any free play of meaning'. The overt and didactic use of affect to generate a particular historical objective can produce counter meanings to those intended.

The art selected for the *Great German Art Exhibition* was chosen for its 'easy legibility' in terms of unambiguously revealing the racial purity and superiority of the Germanic race (Esslinger 2002: 329). The intention was to visually embody a certain standard of beauty to cement the unity of the nation by projecting a moral standard to which everyone should aspire (Mosse 1991: 25). Sandra Esslinger (2002: 325) observes that the Museum's 'seductive' and 'comfortable' environment, and other 'democratic' practices in the Museum were intended to give the sense of the people's ownership and right to the art on display. To highlight this sense of inclusion, the art in the exhibition was offered for sale, an act intended to engender 'Illusions of empowerment and the importance of the citizen ... within the frame of the museum space' (Esslinger 2002: 337).

Many artworks displayed in the Australian *Herald* exhibition were also advertised for sale, a decision intended to decrease social distance by clearly conveying that anyone was worthy of owning a 'masterpiece'. Interested viewers were informed that 'Enquiries should be made at the Desk' (Chanin & Miller 2005: 12). Given that Australian public museum collections were notably lacking in paintings of such impressive provenance, the prospect of their possession by individual Australians was significant. While the *Herald* exhibition and the Nazi Party's *Great German Art Exhibition* were both intended to engender a sense of participation and inclusion, there is a pivotal distinction we can reflect on through Nietzsche's theory of the use and misuse of history. The Nazi's intended to construe their art as monumental; the intent is the abuse that Nietzsche is wary of when monumentalism 'deceives by false analogies: with seductive similarities it inspires the courageous to foolhardiness and the inspired to fanaticism' (Nietzsche 1997: 71). When history is abused in such a manner it is then that the past itself suffers harm, whole segments of it are forgotten, and with this 'empires destroyed, princes murdered, wars and revolutions launched' (Nietzsche 1997: 71). It is at this point, Nietzsche argues, that a critical response is required in order to examine and understand what is happening and if necessary take a knife and excise the danger.

The immense popularity of the 1939 Australian *Herald* 'Exhibition of French and British Contemporary Art' stems from it generating, for many, a sense of measure; the measure of a nation re-engaging its relationship with Europe and with the uncertainties of modernity through the familiar lens of pastoral antiquarianism. This antiquarian identification coincided with the onset of another war. Articles and editorials in the Murdoch press extolling the merits of individual genius and images of art in the *Herald* exhibition shared space with news of mobilization and requests for enlistment. On the other side of the world in Fascist Germany, exhibitions were intended to generate a collective sense of either inclusion or disgust; an intention meant to discredit or thwart any critical response to events as Hitler and Goebbels geared the population toward total war. In Australia, the use of didactic affect in the *Herald* exhibition generated an antiquarian Modernism that resonated for a brief moment as a reassuring form of national security for its urban middle-class audience.

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Notes

- ¹ This figure is formulated on interwar statistics based on the markers of middle class socio-economic status, that is, non-manual occupation and home ownership (Brett 2003: 8).

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